



State Superintendent Leads Effort To Improve SARC Readability

In his [State of Education 2006](#) remarks delivered on February 7, 2006, in Sacramento, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said:

In this day and age of technology and innovation, we also have an obligation to better use data to not only drive our decision-making, but to more clearly and transparently articulate the successes and struggles of all our schools. Too often we talk in what I call "educationese" -- a shorthand dialect of acronyms and jargon that is simply unintelligible to the average person. My friends, in order to succeed, we in the education community must stop speaking only to ourselves. It's time to put the public back in public schools. Along these lines I will begin this year by working to redesign our school accountability report cards in order to make them much more user friendly. These reports cards that were intended to let parents and communities know how

individual schools were doing, have become so unreadable that a UCLA study found them harder to comprehend than several IRS forms and Microsoft Windows XP Driver Installation Instructions! I know we can do better than that.

In response to the Superintendent's direction, the California Department of Education (CDE) has begun to redesign the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) template for the 2006-07 school year. Much of the descriptive and explanatory information contained in the current SARC template will be removed from the template. This information may be moved into a separate document or incorporated into the SARC data definitions. The language in the template will be simplified so that it provides a clearer understanding of what each reporting element contains. In addition, the language will provide families and the school community with a brief explanation of the meaning of the information presented.

The new SARC template, after presentation and adoption by the State Board of Education (SBE), is expected to be published by July 2006. The template will assist local educational

agencies (LEAs) and schools with the preparation of report cards to be published in the 2006-07 school year. The CDE welcomes your continuing feedback about ways to improve the SARC. You may provide such feedback by contacting us as indicated on page 3.

The CDE Wants to Know What You Think of the School Report Card

As part of the State Superintendent's SARC reform effort described above, the CDE is interested in your perspective on the school report card. Currently in development is a Web-based survey that will ask SARC coordinators to respond to a series of questions about their experiences with preparing and publishing the report cards. The CDE encourages you to take a few minutes to participate in the survey and to share your thoughts and ideas. The CDE has also recently initiated a series of focus groups with parents to identify what information parents believe is important to know about their schools and to determine what parents think about the usefulness of the reporting elements that are a part of the SARC. We plan to describe the results of both of these data collection efforts in a future edition of the *SARCnews*.

If your district or school could arrange for a meeting of parents to participate in a focus group session facilitated by CDE staff, please contact us as indicated on page 3.

Assembly Bill 1837: Do We Really Need More SARC Reporting Elements?

Assembly Member Lynn Daucher recently introduced [Assembly Bill 1837](#). This bill, an urgency measure that would take immediate effect, would require the CDE, by January 1, 2007, to recommend for SBE adoption a SARC template revision that would include new data fields for reporting:

- School revenues from any source other than pupil fundraisers
- School expenditures by function in accordance with the CDE's Standardized Account Code Structure
- A listing of the school's noninstructional employees, by classification and number, that would include the employees' salaries and benefits
- The school's multiyear commitments, including cost-of-living adjustments
- The balance of the school's general, special, and reserve funds

The information required by AB 1837 would result in LEAs having to develop and implement new data collection procedures and then to report that data on the annual school report cards.

AB 1837 is currently awaiting its first hearing in the Assembly Education Committee.

The SARC Home Page: It's a SARC Coordinator's Best Friend

The [SARC home page](#) on the CDE Web site contains a wealth of information that is intended primarily to assist SARC coordinators in carrying out their report card responsibilities. The page contains links that are organized into three primary areas: Program Information, SARC Preparation, and Communications. In particular, new SARC coordinators are encouraged to review the information found at the [SARC Preparation Guide](#) link in the SARC Preparation area. All SARC coordinators will likely find answers to many of their questions at the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) link in the Program Information area. This newsletter, as well as all prior editions, can be found at the [Newsletters](#) link in the Communications area.

SARC Question of the Month

The following is the "SARC Question of the Month" along with its answer:

Q. What is one of the most frequently asked SARC questions whose answer can be found at the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) link on the [SARC home page](#)?

Are LEAs required to publish SARC's by a specific date?

According to state and federal law, LEAs must annually update and disseminate SARC's to provide current information to parents and other members of the public. The CDE interprets "annually" to mean

"once in each school year." In most years, some of the required data may not be available until the end of October or later. Therefore, the preparation of report cards that comply with SBE-adopted requirements governing content and definitions may not be complete until November.

Since SARC's must be prepared and disseminated before the end of the school year to comply with the law, LEAs must prepare and disseminate new SARC's sometime during the period of November through May of each year. As a result, the most current reports must continue to be available to the public until new reports are prepared during the next year's publication cycle.

If you have questions or comments about the topics covered in this newsletter, or suggestions for topics for a future newsletter, please contact us as indicated below.

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